

Introduction

Here's a great word for you: 'kânâph' (canaff)! Try it now. Brilliant, you have just spoken in Hebrew, the language of Jesus! And do you know what the word means? 'kânâph' – 'Wings'. More about that in a minute.

Have you ever felt like you are sidelined with no prospects coming over the horizon? That's how I felt in 1993, but little did I know this would result in discovering not only the depths of God's love, but His willingness to meet me where I was – plus His desire not to leave me there. What's more, the echoes of those days continue to influence me to this moment.

Responding to an invitation, I left Eastwood to live with my sister's family near the town of Kirriemuir in the Scottish Glens, fifteen miles from the city of Dundee. Well, why not? I wasn't working, and all my efforts to find a job had failed.

For the next three months, we drove from the cottage every week to my uncle's church in Dundee. Then as I became involved in their soup kitchen before preaching and drumming there, it made sense for me to leave Kirriemuir and move closer into a bedsit on the city outskirts, overlooking the North Sea beaches. However, a fresh benefits claim had to be made, which meant that for the next six weeks I faced life with absolutely no money coming in.

The usual rent, gas, electric, laundry, bus fares, and food bills had to come out of that zero income, and I was thrown onto total reliance on God. Was that a bad place to be? As I quickly found out, the answer was no!

Six weeks of constant – sometimes miraculous – provision from God followed: a box of Cornflakes never emptied despite being used twice a day and I began to question how many flakes *Kellogg's* put in. Another time, a man from the church, unaware of my state, arrived laden with bags, following a strange buzzing thought to bring food to me. On one very desperate situation, cash quite literally appeared out of thin air into my trouser pocket, while other gifts fell, unasked for, through the mail every week just in time to pay bills. The list goes on.

This is no fairy tale: these events *really* happened, and in that time of extreme poverty, not once did I ever see a need unmet.

After six weeks, the benefits money finally arrived along with an offer of becoming a crew member and tourist guide on an old Royal Navy warship while creating models and displays onboard and in other museums around Scotland. How cool was that? And you know what? That very morning, the last of the cornflakes dropped into the bowl: the famine had passed.

But what on earth had just happened to me?

Luke 13:34, 35

Luke's Gospel chapter 13 describes the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Olives, looking down through tear-filled eyes on the city of Jerusalem, spread out like a carpet before Him. His heart gave a cry – maybe even a groan – of pain:

"Oh, Jerusalem. Jerusalem ... How I longed to gather your children as a hen gathers her chicks under her kânâph – wings, and you were not willing..."

On many occasions Jesus had visited this so-called 'City of Peace', healing and delivering the sick and oppressed within its walls, and bringing His Gospel: the 'Good News' of the promise of a new, better, and eternal life. Now He stands thinking of His entrance into Jerusalem, to be welcomed as its returning King by the same people who would soon demand His Crucifixion; the very Son of God offering lasting peace firmly and completely rejected to the point of death itself.

And yet, thank God, this was no accident. His death and Resurrection would buy our own salvation. But why, of all times, is Jesus standing here thinking of hens, chicks, and wings? What is going on?

Actually, the answer is pretty amazing.

Out of all the Bible verses speaking of wings, thirteen are directly related to God, and apart from three exceptions, in each they describe eagles' wings carrying powerful images:

- In Exodus and Deuteronomy, God's wings carried the Israelites out of slavery to Egypt, across the Wilderness, and into the Lord's presence at Mount Sinai.
- In the Psalms, God's wings cast their shadow over us like a shield or castle wall, providing refuge from disaster.
- In Jeremiah, God's wings carry His judgement against our enemies.
- In Isaiah, God's wings give us renewed strength to walk, run, and fly.
- In Ruth, God's wings reward and repay kindness.

- In Malachi, God's wings cause the sun to rise, bringing healing and triggering God's people to run and play in the wide fields like cattle released from their stalls.
- And in Revelation, God's wings allow us to overcome all obstacles.
- Don't forget, too, in 1 Kings 17, the Prophet Elijah fed in the Wilderness every morning and evening with bread and meat carried by ravens as he hid from his enemies. Then, the Holy Spirit, in Luke 3, settled in the form of a dove upon our blessed Lord as He was baptised in the River Jordan!

But on the Mount of Olives, and for the only time in the Bible, our Lord uses the picture of a Mother Hen burying her tiny balls of cheeping yellow fluff under her wings. However, isn't it a little odd to compare God's relationship to the population of Jerusalem with a farmyard scene?

Not at all. Have you ever heard the phrase, 'Mother Hen?' They have that reputation for a very good reason.

Impossible to separate parent from young since hatching, Mother Hen spends most of her day teaching them how to forage, feed and drink. But should danger threaten her offspring, Mother Hen transforms into a blinding flurry of kicks, pecks, and scratches – even attacking dogs and people! Nothing is too big to cause Mother Hen to flee, but instead she uses her entire body to protect and care for her young. Do you know that in the case of wild fires, charred bodies of Mother Hens have later been found with live chicks safely huddled underneath? She had literally sacrificed herself to the flames for their sake. Isn't that just like Jesus on the Cross using His own body to rescue us from sin and hellfire and, instead, to lead us into becoming a part of His family?

Saint Augustine once said, *"You shall be safe under His feathers. If a hen protects her young ones under wings, how much more shall you be safe under the wings of God..."*

Yes. In talking about Mother Hen, Jesus had settled upon an illustration that came closest to displaying His desire for caring, protecting, nurturing, and guiding His own precious children. After all, God promised in Isaiah 41:10: *"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."*

Conclusion

God cares about relationship, and possibly nothing shows that more than the closeness of a chick under a wing. Revelation 4:11 says that God created all things out of pleasure – He formed you because He wanted to. Reading through the Bible every year, I have become profoundly aware that His desire

to be involved with His creation runs like a river under the pages; from walking with Adam in the Garden of Eden to Jesus living and working as one of us, and on to our eternal home with God in Heaven. He so LONGS to “gather His children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...” and He weeps that “...you were not willing...” to allow Him that.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, I am here to tell you the biggest lesson I ever learned in life in the hope that you too may know the peace and fulfilment I have found. To again quote Saint Augustine: “You have made us for Yourself and our heart is restless until it comes to rest in You.” That is probably one of the truest things ever said, and here is why...

Think back to the symbols of wings we have already looked at in the Bible and see how they relate to our own lives today. I add my voice to millions of others in believing that I can see the promises of God at work in mine. Keeping myself close to the Lord and under His care I am:

- Lifted out of slavery to sinful habits and into the Lord's gentle presence;
- I have been shielded from disaster – from actual death on three occasions, and even from contemplating suicide before I really knew the Lord;
- I am given renewed strength whenever I feel I can't carry on;
- As Hebrews 11:6 says, I am rewarded for earnestly seeking after God;
- I have been healed: physically on a number of occasions, and then finding relief from bad memories. Instead, the Lord brings me into a place of greater freedom in Himself;
- I have been enabled to overcome obstacles – any stammer I may show today is *nothing* compared to the level-five I once suffered. An expert once described it as the worst she had ever seen, and yet here I am;
- I am guided and provided for in every single area of life with nothing left out;
- And arguably the greatest blessing of all: I am being filled and led daily by the blessed Holy Spirit.

We often fly away from God while He calls us to trust Him under His wings. Protection, provision, power, peace, guidance, healing, and comfort – these are what Father God's wings offer to us. So, please, do not allow fear or doubt to make you unwilling and stop you from entering into the best life ever walking daily with the One who loves you the most. Talk to God about *everything*, and learn about Him in the Bible, and you will find out how much He *really* loves you and longs to be close, caring for you throughout your life.

You know, the best thing really is to REST in God's promises and to let HIM lift us up on His '*kânâph*'; HIS wings. *That* there is the biggest lesson I ever learned.